



# Evaluation of Internet Addiction and Psychological Distress among University Students

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**Abstract:** The present study is an attempt to assess internet addiction and psychological distress among university students. The sample in the study consisted of one hundred university students out of which 61 were males and 39 were females who were selected on the purposive basis from the main campus of Kashmir University. Young's Internet Addiction Scale (IAT), Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) and Demographic Data sheet were used to collect research data from informants. The obtained data were analysed by frequency method, Pearson correlation method and t-test. The results revealed that male university students experienced more internet addiction and psychological distress as compared to the female university students and a significant positive correlation was found between internet addiction and psychological distress among university students. Moreover, the results also indicated that rural university students experienced more internet addiction and psychological distress as compared to urban university students.

**Keywords:** Internet Addiction; Psychological Distress; University Students

## Introduction

The Internet is a widely recognized channel for information exchange, academic research, entertainment, communication and commerce (Moore, 1995; Widyanto and Griffiths, 2006; Douglas et al., 2008; Byun et al., 2009). Although the positive aspects of the Internet have been readily praised, there is a growing amount of literature on the negative side of its excessive and pathological use (Chou and Hsiao, 2000; Caplan, 2003; Beard, 2005; Frangos and Frangos, 2009). Byun et al. (2009) estimate that 9 million Americans could be labeled as pathological Internet users with unpleasant consequences for their social life, their professional status and their psychological condition (Shapira et al., 2000; Shapira et al., 2003; Young, 2004; Walker, 2006). In the scientific literature, several terms have been proposed to describe pathological Internet use: Internet addiction, cyberspace addiction, Internet addiction disorder, online addiction, Net addiction, pathological Internet use, high Internet dependency, problematic Internet use and others (Widyanto and Griffiths, 2006; Byun et al., 2009). Internet addiction is defined as an individual's inability to control his or her use of the internet, which eventually causes psychological, social, school and/or work difficulties in a person's life (Davis 2001; Young & Rogers, 1998). Like other addictions, internet addiction has been linked to a variety of problems. Besides little sleep, failure to eat for long periods and limited physical activity, it also disrupts the studies and other aspects of the daily life of an individual (Cao & Su, 2006). University students are considered as a high risk group for IA (Kandell, 1998; Young and Rogers, 1998; Nalwa and Anand, 2003; Niemz et al., 2005). Possible reasons for this are: (a) students have huge blocks of unstructured time, (b) schools and universities provide free and unlimited access to the Internet, (c) students from the ages of 18–22 years are for the first time away from parental control without anyone monitoring or censoring what they say or do online, (d) young students experience new problems of adapting to university life and finding new friends, and often end up seeking a companionship by using different applications of the Internet, (e) students receive full

encouragement from faculty and administrators in using the different Internet applications, (f) adolescents are more trained to use the different applications of technological inventions and especially the Internet, (g) students desire to escape university sources of stress resulting from their obligations to pass exams, compose essays and complete their degrees in the prescribed time with reasonable marks, and finally (h) students feel that university life is alienated from social activities, and when they finish their studies, the job market with all its uncertainties is a field where they must participate and succeed in finding employment (Young, 2004).

Research findings have shown that excessive use of Internet or Internet addiction adversely affects one's physical health, family life, and academic performance. Academic problems caused by Internet addiction include decline in study habits, significant drop in grades, missing classes, increased risk of being placed on academic probation, and poor integration in extracurricular activities. Besides, adolescent Internet addicts often suffer from severe psychological distress, such as depression; anxiety; compulsivity; feeling of self-effacement; fear that life without Internet would be boring, empty, and joyless; as well as feeling of loneliness and social isolation. Internet users are not a homogenous group. Mafe and Blass (2006) proposed that a profile of internet-dependent users is young. Young internet users (that is between 19 to 24 years old) were more at risk of becoming internet addicts than older users (Soule et al., 2003; Thatcher and Goolam, 2005).

Several studies have reported gender differences in internet usage. Weiser (2000) reported significant gender difference in internet usage. He reported that males tend to be more familiar with the computers and internet as compared to females. Same gender differences were stated in the literature concerning internet addiction. Scherer (1997) suggested that dependent internet users included a large proportion of men as compared to women. Similar results were reported by Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2000) that males were more likely to be pathological internet users than females.

Psychological distress is a major problem of present era, especially for student population. Any situation that evokes negative thoughts and feelings in a person such as unpleasant, frustrating, irritable, worrisome, and anxious is considered psychological distress. According to Chalfant et al, (1990) psychological distress is "a continuous experience of unhappiness, nervousness, irritability and problematic interpersonal relationships". Internet addiction also may contribute to anxiety and stress (Egger & Rauterberg, 1996; Yu, 2001). Those who suffer from anxiety and stress often have a great deal of trouble communicating and interacting with others in a healthy, positive, and meaningful way. These human characteristics are viewed as important determinants of internet addiction. Moreover, an association between increased Internet use and psychological distress and loneliness has also been found (Kraut, et al. 1998). As the inconsistent findings in foreign context, the similar research should be encouraged and necessary to carry out in Kashmir context, which could not only add more academic evidence in this field, but also enrich the academic researches of Kashmir. This study took a group of post-graduate students in Kashmir University to examine their Internet use status and psychological distress, as well as the relationship of internet

addiction and psychological distress. Following are the objectives of the study:

1. To study internet addiction and psychological distress among university students.
2. To study the relationship between internet addiction and psychological distress among university students.
3. To study the difference in internet addiction among university students with respect to their gender and residence.
4. To study the difference in psychological distress among university students with respect to their gender and residence.

### **Hypotheses of the study**

On the basis of above mentioned objectives, following hypotheses were formulated.

**Ho1.** There is not a significant correlation between internet addiction and psychological distress among university students.

**Ho2.** There is no significant difference in internet addiction among university students with respect to their gender.

**Ho3.** There is no significant difference in psychological distress among university students with respect to their gender.

**Ho4.** There is no significant difference in internet addiction among university students with respect to their residence.

**Ho5.** There is no significant difference in psychological distress among university students with respect to their residence.

**Methodology:**

**Participants:** The study is based on the sample of 100 university students enrolled in various post-graduate programs at the Kashmir University, Kashmir. Out of 100 university students 61 were males and 39 were females.

**Tools used:** To collect the desired data for the present study, two standardised psychological tests were used.

- (1) Young Internet Addiction Scale (IAT)
- (2) Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)

**(1) Young Internet Addiction Scale (IAT)**

Young’s questionnaire which contains 20 questions is one the most popular questionnaire in the majority of researches (Ghasemzadeh et al., 2007).The 1998 version of the abovementioned questionnaire was implemented in this study. Yoo & colleagues (2004) found Chronbach Alfa coefficient to be greater than 0.9 as did Whang and colleagues. Dargahi (2006) found the coefficient of stability of this questionnaire to be 0.88 (Ghasemzadeh et al, 2007) .The 20 questions of this questionnaire are scored on a 5-point scale, (ranging from 1 to 5). The marking range for this test is from 0 to 100, where the higher the mark the greater dependence on the internet.

**(2) Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) 1996**

The Kessler psychological distress scale (K10) (Kessler, 1996) is a widely used, simple self-report measure of psychological distress which can be used to identify those in need of further assessment for anxiety and depression. The K10 comprises 10 questions where respondents are required to choose between ‘All of the time’, ‘Most of the time’, ‘Some of the time’, ‘A little of the time’, and ‘ None of the time’ and are scored from five through to one. The total score ranges from 10 to 50 and the maximum score of 50 indicates severe distress while the minimum score of 10 indicates no distress. Kessler and colleagues (2002), found that the Cronbach's alpha for the K10 (a measure of internal consistency reliability) to be high (.93). The brief questionnaire has been shown to have good construct and criterion validity (Kessler et al., 2002), being significantly associated with measures of mental health symptoms and disability as well as the frequency on consultations for a mental health problem in the previous 12 month period.

**Procedure:** These two measures were in printed form and were administered on each selected subject by assuring them that information provided by them will be kept strictly confidential. Having obtained the data from the subjects, the data were tabulated for giving statistical treatment for obtaining the results.

**Statistical Analysis:** Keeping in view the nature of research problem and to meet the objectives of the study the data collected was analyzed by using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS 16.0). Statistical techniques used for analyzing data were: frequencies, percentages, correlation and t-test.

**Results and Interpretation:**

Table 1

*Showing Frequency and Percentage of Sample Group With Respect to Internet Addiction*

Level	Range	f	%
Mild	0-49	67	67
Moderate	50-79	29	29
Severe	80-100	4	4
Total		100	100

Table 1 reveals that out of 100 university students 67% were found mild on internet addiction, where as 29% were found moderate and 4% were found severe on internet addiction.

Table 2

*Showing Frequency and Percentage of Sample Group With Respect to Psychological Distress*

Level	Range	<i>f</i>	%
Low	10-19	48	48
Moderate	20-29	21	21
High	30-50	31	31
Total		100	100

Table 2 reveals that out of 100 university students 48% were found low on psychological distress, where as 21% were found moderate and 31% were found high on psychological distress.

Table 3

*Showing Pearson's Correlation Coefficient(*r*) Between Internet Addiction and Psychological Distress of the Sample Group*

Variable	<i>r</i>
Internet Addiction	.854*( <i>p</i> = <0.001)
Psychological Distress	

\*.*P*<0.05 Level of significance

Table 3 reveals that there is a significant positive correlation ( $r=.854^*$ ,  $p = <0.001$ ) between psychological distress and internet addiction among university students, indicating “*more the psychological distress, more is the extrinsic religious orientation and less the psychological distress, less is the internet addiction.*” Thus our null hypothesis *H*<sub>01</sub> which states that, “*There is not a significant correlation between internet addiction and psychological distress among university students.*” Stands rejected.

Table 4

*Showing the Comparison of Mean Scores of Internet Addiction and Psychological Distress among University Students with respect to their Gender*

Variable	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Internet Addiction	Male	61	45.16	21.08	98	5.25*
	Female	39	23.12	16.70		
Psychological Distress	Male	61	25.40	11.16	98	4.41*
	Female	39	16.46	7.42		
Total N=100						

\**p*<0.05 level of significance

The table 4 reveals that there is a significant difference in internet addiction and

psychological distress between male and female university students ( $t = 5.25$  &  $t = 4.41$ ). The results show that males have more internet addiction and psychological distress as compared to their counterparts. Thus, our null hypotheses *H*<sub>02</sub> which states that, “*There is no significant*

*difference in internet addiction among university students with respect to their gender*”, and  $H_{03}$  which states that , *“There is no significant difference in psychological distress among university students with respect to their gender”*, stand rejected.

Table 5

*Showing the Comparison of Mean Scores of Internet Addiction and Psychological Distress among University Students with respect to their Residential Area*

Variable	Residence	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>t-value</i>
Internet Addiction	Urban	35	27.08	17.68	98	3.29*
	Rural	65	41.67	22.76		
Psychological Distress	Urban	35	17.65	7.95	98	3.02*
	Rural	65	24.21	11.42		
Total N=100						

\* $p < 0.05$  level of significance

The table 5 reveals that there is a significant difference in internet addiction and psychological distress between urban and rural university students ( $t = 5.25$  &  $t = 4.41$ ). The results show that rural students have more internet addiction and psychological distress as compared to the urban students. Thus, our null hypotheses  $H_{04}$  which states that, *“There is no significant difference in internet addiction among university students with respect to their residence”*; and  $H_{05}$  which states that, *“There is no significant difference in psychological distress among university students with respect to their residence”*, stand rejected.

## Discussion

The aim of the present study was to study internet addiction and psychological distress among university students and the relation of internet addiction with psychological distress. The comparison among university students on internet addiction and psychological distress with respect to their gender and residence has also been examined.

The results of the present study revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between internet addiction and psychological distress among university students. There are several studies which are in line with these results. Research studies has shown that internet addiction has positive correlation with psychological distress and other other psychiatric symptoms (Kelleci, Güler, Sezer, & Gölbaşı, 2009). Moreover, several researchers have found statistically meaningful correlation between internet usage and psychological symptoms as a somatization, obsessive-compulsive, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, psychoticism (Koç, 2011). Similarly Kraut et al., (1998) found that greater internet use is associated with reduced psychological

Wellbeing, reduced social support, increased loneliness and depression.

Comparing the university students on internet addiction and psychological distress with respect to their gender, significant difference was found among them on both internet addiction and psychological distress. The mean score of male university students was found high as compared to female university students. There are several studies which are in consistence of our findings. For example, Akman and Mishra (2010) in their study found that male students are more likely to become addicted addicted to internet than are females and pathological internet users are likely to be male. That might be due to the traditional stereotypes of gender roles holding that women are not as technologically oriented as men and computer has been considered stereotypically masculine (Papastergiou and Solomonidou, 2005); and females may cultivate a fairly negative attitude towards it and their mild disinterest (Durndell & Haag, 2002).

As compared to female university students, male university students were found high on psychological distress. The earlier research on psychological distress among university students have mixed results. Several studies are inconsistent with our findings. For example Blazer, Kessler, McGonagle, Swartz, (1994); Regier, Farmer, Rae, Myers, Kramer, Robins (1993); and Regier, Boyd, Burke, Rae, Myers, Kramer, (1998) found that prevalence of psychological

distress, depression, the life time risk of depression and anxiety are higher in woman than in their male counterparts. The preponderance of female psychopathology is also demonstrated in the student population. Similarly, Toews (1997) found that female students experience higher stress level than male counterparts. Similarly Supe (1998) and Guthrie Black, Shaw, Hamilton, Creed, & Tomenson (1995) found that there was no significant difference in psychological distress between male and female university students.

The results of the study further reveal that there is a significant difference among University students on internet addiction and psychological distress with respect to their residence. The mean score of rural students was found on both internet addiction and psychological distress as compared to the urban students. Research studies has shown that habit of changing/manipulating information on the internet, habit of downloading vulgar pictures/pornographic items, plagiarism and tendency of sending unwanted messages and internet abuse are comparatively high among the adolescents in rural areas (Koovakkai, Dineshan, and Muhammed, 2010). Similarly Niemz, Griffiths, & Banyard, (2005) found that the rate of internet addiction is higher for rural students (8%) than for city students (5%). Rural students were found high on psychological distress as compared to urban students. Several studies support these findings. Kuruppuarachchi, Wijerathne and Williams (2002) found that psychological distress among rural students was significantly greater than suburban and urban students. Similarly studies done by Kathriarachchi, Ariyaratne, & Jiffry, (2001) and Kuruppuarachchi Somerathne, Madurapperuma, & Talagala, (2012) recognized that adjustment problems and economic difficulties of rural university students are one of the major key factors, which govern psychological distress among them.

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